

By LEE CHEN HOE

THIS year, 2026, marks 30 meaningful years since I was given a new lease of life through a cadaveric kidney transplant at Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL).

I owe this “Gift of Life” to Mrs Magde Bender, who made the selfless decision to donate the kidneys and corneas of her late husband, Carl Bender, an American expatriate who was pronounced brain-dead following a brain haemorrhage at the age of 56.

His organs went on to benefit six people, for which we remain eternally grateful. Every day is truly a bonus.

My transplant gave me not only a new lease of life, but also a purpose: to promote awareness of organ donation.

My first campaign was an appearance on the *What You Say* TV programme alongside senior consultant nephrologist Datuk Dr Zaki Morad, the then head of the Nephrology Department at HKL, who is now chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Kidney Foundation.

A representative from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jakim) also participated, offering an Islamic perspective on organ donation.

With the cooperation of doctors, medical staff, NGOs, organ

The gift of life

recipients and members of the public, we established a patient support group, which was registered with the Registrar of Societies as the Green Ribbon Support Association in 2000.

I served as its founding honorary secretary until 2012.

Under the leadership of Mr Balachanthar, with strong support from Institut Jantung Negara (IJN) transplant coordinator Sr Ramayee, we organised seminars featuring doctors, dietitians and motivational speakers.

We also published three issues of the *Transplant Info* newsletter and organised four Malaysian Transplant Games between 2002 and 2006.

These efforts gave me opportunities to work with IJN and later the National Transplant Resource Centre as a volunteer promoting organ donation.

Over the years, I travelled across the country to share my experience at more than 50 hospitals, universities, colleges and NGOs, while managing awareness campaigns and speaking to the media.

Since 2002, I have also helped manage organ donation counters at the Buddhist Maha Vihara

Temple in Brickfields during Wesak, encouraging devotees to pledge their organs after death.

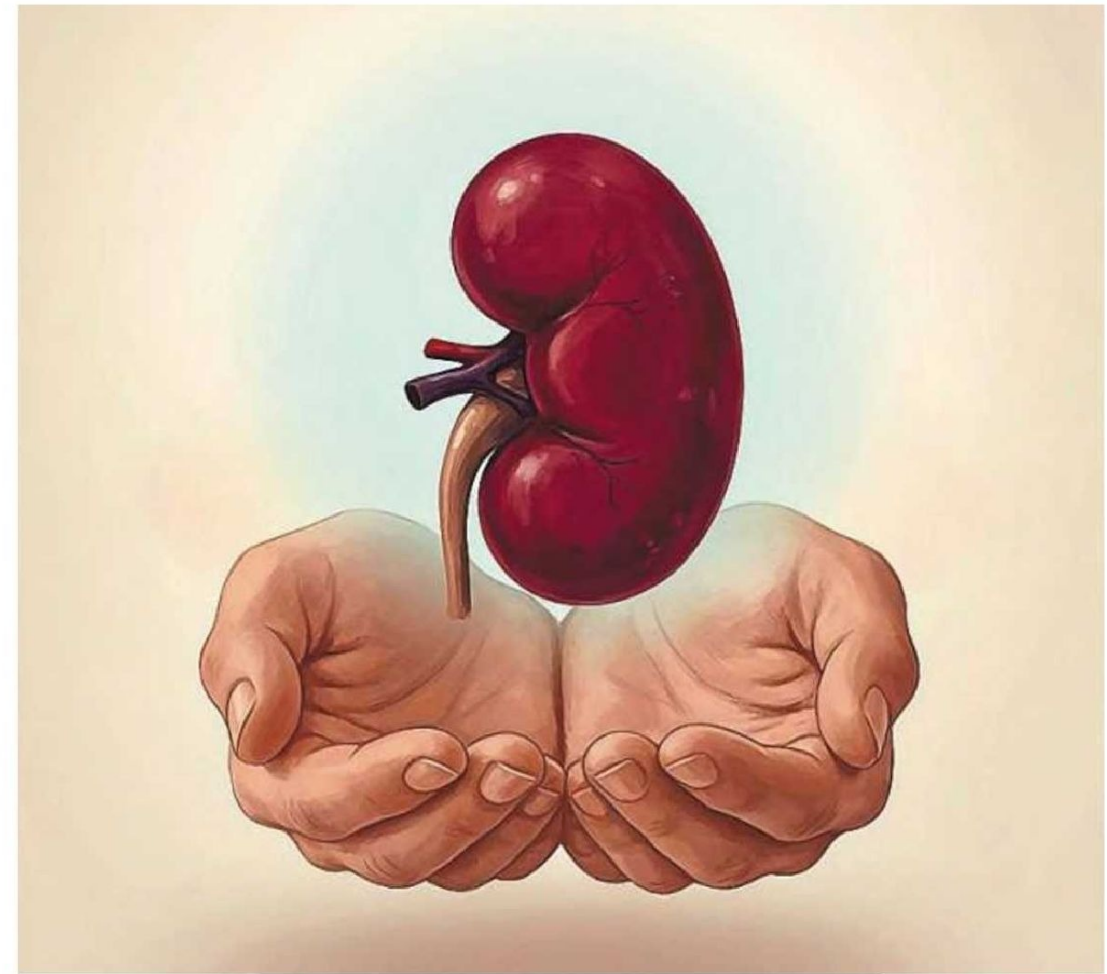
Among the most satisfying moments was learning that a mother, after hearing me speak about my experience, went on to successfully donate one of her kidneys to her daughter.

Another memorable occasion came in 2009, when a first-year Universiti Malaya medical student arranged an organ donation talk.

Ten years later, she told me that my experience as a kidney recipient had inspired her – and she is now a nephrologist.

The transplant has allowed me to achieve many things I might otherwise never have experienced: completing my MBA, attending my twin daughters’ graduations, reconnecting with my donor’s family through an online search after 22 years, and representing Malaysia at the World Transplant Games in Canada, Australia, Bangkok and Japan, where our team won gold medals in badminton and table tennis.

Most importantly, I have been able to travel and enjoy holidays with my family.



The gift of a kidney gave the author a new lease of life and a purpose: to spread awareness on organ donation. — Magnific

I also had the privilege of serving as organising secretary and chief editor of the centenary commemorative magazine for my alma mater, SJKC Chap Khuan, and later led family members to Huizhou District in Guangzhou, China, where we reconnected with relatives, visited our ancestral home and prayed at the family altar.

Today, with about 10,000 kidney patients on the waiting list and only around 200 cadaveric kidneys available each year, the need for organ donors remains urgent.

After 30 years of bonus life, my sincere hope is that sharing my journey will inspire more people to step forward and give others the same precious gift of life.